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# Clover Bar Celebration

## Fifty Years of Homesteading

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Address by

Hon. Frank Oliver

# FIFTY YEARS OF HOMESTEADING

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I AM very glad of this opportunity to join in celebrating the first half century of farm occupation of this district of Canada West and of meeting again my old friend Mr. R. P. Ottewell, who, with Thomas Jackson, drove the stakes by which they claimed their homesteads, then unsurveyed, 50 years ago. They were not the first to stake, but they were the first who stuck. W. D. Carscadden joined them the next year. Jackson and Carscadden have passed on but Mr. Ottewell's presence adds significance to this occasion and I am sure the occasion gives great pleasure to him. It is not given to many of us to enjoy the fruits of our labors and to see the justification of our foresight of half a century ago as Mr. Ottewell does today.

I am something of an old-timer myself, but I have to take a back seat to Mr. Ottewell, whose advent to the prairies was nearly four years earlier than mine. However, circumstances over which he had no control broke his western connection for a time. He was in Fort Garry nearly four years before I reached Winnipeg, but I had already been nearly four years in Edmonton when he staked his claim in Clover Bar. I say this only to establish my right to a place beside Mr. Ottewell and the other good men and true who were the pioneers of this favored region. The printer who set the type of the first issues of The Bulletin in the winter of 1880-81 had already staked a claim at Clover Bar. His name was Collins. Printers of that day were light of foot and inclined to rove. It would have been little less than a miracle if he had stayed to farm. I think he moved on to Red Deer during the next summer.

The name Clover Bar was not given with any reference to farming possibilities. In the gold rush of the late 60's Tom Clover worked the gravel bar at the present crossing of the National Railway Bridge. Naturally it became known as Clover's, and then Clover Bar. Long after Tom Clover had sought other and distant fields, or indeed been forgotten, first the flat on the south bank of the river adjacent to the bar and then the beautiful upland region between the river valley and the Beaver Hills became known as the Clover Bar district or, for short, Clover Bar.

Half a century is a long, long time measured by the life of a man. But it is only a short space in the life of a nation. The world has moved fast and far in the past 50 years. But the changes that Mr. Ottewell and I have seen in this particular section of country have, I think, more than kept pace with world progress. Then, we may fairly be said to have been at the back

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of beyond and were certainly far out of reach of the ordinary advantages of civilized life.

In August of 1881 the possibility of successful farming in this part of Alberta had yet to be demonstrated. Mr. Ottewell and his fellow pioneers staked their time, their labor, their prospects and all they had on their judgment when they drove the stakes that marked their claims. Winnipeg was the only base of communication and supply. More than 30 days by team and buckboard over a thousand miles of trail through almost utterly uninhabited country; or 60 to 90 days by oxen and freight carts or wagons. Today if we do not reach Winnipeg in 24 hours by train, travelling not only in comfort but in luxury, we have a well-grounded grievance against the railway service. May I suggest that it was the presence and activities of the pioneers in demonstrating the farming possibilities of the district that were the prime cause of the railway being built, and so bringing about the changed conditions of today. I remember that very long ago, in the discouraging '80's, when from year to year we were hoping and waiting for the railway which it seemed would never come, word reached The Bulletin, over which I then presided in lonely grandeur, that Ottewell, of Clover Bar, had just threshed a crop of oats yielding over 100 bushels to the acre. It was a record yield at the time; and the more notable because only a few years before the oats which fed the Mounted Police horses at Fort Saskatchewan were grown at Sun River, Montana, and were hauled by string teams of mules or by oxen with trail wagons to Calgary, and by ponies or oxen and carts from Calgary to Fort Saskatchewan. In the very early days oats had not been grown in this country. It was generally supposed that they could not be. Mr. Ottewell's hundred bushel an acre crop established beyond argument not only that oats could be grown but that they grew here more abundantly and of better quality than anywhere else in the world. This big crop had a marked effect in putting heart and confidence into the pioneers who at that time were much in need of encouragement. What Mr. Ottewell had done others could do, and they did. By the time the railroad had reached Edmonton South, or Stratheona, from Calgary this district had become so well established as a producer of high quality oats that Brackman-Ker of Victoria, B.C., built a mill in Stratheona to produce rolled oats for nation-wide distribution, the first oatmeal mill, I believe, west of Manitoba.

The story of wheat followed much the same course as that of oats. It was said that ours was not a wheat country. The seasons were too short. There were summer frosts. Hailstorms took a fearful toll. Mr. Ottewell and his neighbors were leaders in producing wheat as well as oats. Notwithstanding all discouragements the pioneers persisted in growing wheat at Clover Bar. Today Canada West is the leading wheat exporting country of the world and sets the world standard of quality.

I am not going to suggest that Phil Ottewell and his neighbors of Clover Bar did more than their proper share in the work of building up the material welfare of the nation. But I desire to assert with all emphasis that they did their share, and did it well. They never lagged behind. They were always in the lead. I propose to further suggest with all confidence that the presence, the precept, and the example throughout the years of pioneers such as Mr. Ottewell and his neighbors had, as it must have had, an important influence in directing the thoughts and therefore the activities not only of their own but of other neighborhoods along the lines that they held to be right and have been proven to be for the best. May I be permitted as an old friend to speak particularly of Mr. Ottewell: While he never assumed a position or attitude of leadership either officially or unofficially; and never looked for the honor of public approval, his judgment was so highly respected that I fully believe his influence was greater, at least during the earlier and formative years of the settlement, than that of any other man in the district. Therefore he is entitled to a full share of credit for the successes that have been achieved and for the reputation which this settlement holds throughout Canada West.

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It is regrettable that too often it is assumed that when the pioneer stage has passed the work of building up the country is finished. My thought is that however successful the pioneer or however great and good his work he has only laid the foundation, and that its value is more in the character of the super-structure that is built upon it than in the foundation itself. Without the fitting super-structure the purpose of the foundation has failed. Therefore there is, or ought to be, the closest possible relationship between the work of the pioneers and that of their successors.

The main problems of 50 years ago are not those of today. Then it had yet to be proven that the winters were not too cold for reasonable comfort, nor the summer too short and changeable for profitable production; and that conditions of social life could be established and maintained that would make life worth living. All that is now behind us; and it may be forgotten. The successful growing of oats and wheat where they had never been grown before was a great achievement. But the main purpose was not merely to grow more and better wheat and more and better oats from year to year but to create condition of progressive well-being of the people of the locality and of the nation. This was the objective of the first attempt to establish a public school in Clover Bar when there were not enough children in the settlement to give a sufficient attendance. Later on the school was established as soon as the number of children permitted, the result of a vote; although the voters who had no families out-

numbered those who had. Road-making began with the beginning of settlement. Education and transportation were problems of that day as they remain problems of this. But we have many others now that did not exist then.

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The task of nation building is never finished. There is and can be no standing still. It is a law of nature that when growth ceases decay begins. Changed conditions bring new problems or old problems in a new form. Progress must always depend on the successful solution of the problems of the day, whatever they may be. The foundation of the country was laid by the pioneers but the super-structure must be the work of their successors.

I have at times heard two widely differing views as to the value of the work of the pioneers. One is that considering their opportunities they should have made a better job, and so created easier conditions for their successors. In any case, the changes of conditions are so great that no lessons of value can be drawn from a study of their labors, means or methods. The other view is that the problems which confronted them having been solved it is only necessary for their successors to carry on. In this case the initiative, the foresight, the determination of the pioneer is replaced by a smug complacency that does not recognize either the need or the possibility of betterment. In my opinion both views are wrong. The first ignores the results and advantages of experience and the second the qualities that in every calling and at all times are imperatively necessary to success.

Modern conditions have revolutionized human relationships and especially so in rural communities. The maintenance of these new relationships on a proper basis may reasonably and properly claim the largest measure of present attention. There has been a corresponding revolution in economic conditions from like causes. After all, social conditions are intimately related to the character and productivity of the land. If the land does not produce the social fabric must decay and ultimately fall down. I will not discuss the problems of production; the ceaseless endeavor to improve methods and increase results both in field crops and live stock to keep abreast of world progress and to meet the vagaries of the world's markets. There are the chances of varying seasons; the never ending battle with noxious weeds, insect pests and plant diseases. And all this while maintaining and bettering the amenities of social life and taking due part in all public affairs. There are, and must always be, enough farm and outside problems to claim the attention and effort of the best minds and the most willing hands. The condition never arrives when the spirit of the pioneer is not needed.

In a state of nature this Clover Bar district was very fair to look upon. Its park-like condition of alternating woods and prairie; its background of the Beaver Hills; its gently undu-

lating slope to the river valley; and the spreading view of the country on the north side, together with its rich soil and luxuriant vegetation, gave inspiration to the pioneers. Today it has the added interest of human habitation and the evidences of well directed human energy. Man has taken possession. The beauty of the landscape is now increased by well kept fields and suitable and convenient dwellings and outbuildings on its many farms. May I offer the suggestion that in such a district every farmer owes it to himself and to his neighbors that both his farm and his buildings shall so far as that may be possible add to the beauty of the landscape; not necessarily because of size or cost, but rather because of their being well ordered and well kept and suitable for the purposes they are intended to serve.

I remember that many years ago the first tree nursery of Northern Alberta was started in the Clover Bar district. May I offer the opinion that nothing adds so much to the beauty of a farm home as suitably planted trees and shrubs and a well kept garden of vegetables and flowers. Where such planting is general there is an added beauty of the landscape that has an important cash value in addition to all other and possibly more important considerations. As in so many other ways I note that Mr. Ottewell has not been backward in the beautification of the homestead that he now occupies.

The landscape of rural England is the most beautiful in the world. But if the luxuriance of nature had not been given orderly development what is now practically park would have been merely jungle. The sense of beauty, the pride of possession, the determination to excel, shows in the rose bush of the wayside cottage as well as in the elaborate parks and gardens of the mansions and castles of the great. It is because the occupant of the cottage as well as of the mansion is intent on creating his due share of the common beauty that the whole landscape is so very beautiful. A run-down farm or neglected buildings injure the appearance of the whole landscape and reduce the value of all property within sight.

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So far I have spoken as though men alone were pioneers. That was only to make my story short; not because I did not know better. Eden was not really Eden until Eve came. If it was not good for Adam to be alone in Eden it is much worse for a man, and still worse for a woman, to be alone on a homestead. Team work is a first necessity in successful homesteading. The lone homesteader is like a single horse hitched to a double wagon. His strength cannot be adjusted to the load. Or if he does succeed in making a farm out of a homestead, after all it just isn't worth while if he remains alone. It is the business of the man to lead and to give leadership. It is the business of the woman to give inspiration, direction and driving force to that

leadership. Work is always worth the husband's doing if the wife wants it done. I have spoken of the influence of Mr. Otte-  
well and his fellow pioneers in the advancement of this district. I am sure that he and they would be the first to agree that without the aid and counsel of their life partners they would not, and indeed could not, have achieved the measure of material success that together they have enjoyed, or the place they hold in the life of the community. The only pioneer who stuck and succeeded was the man whose wife made success possible.

Men and women have each their part to play in building the nation. Far be it from me at any time, and particularly on this occasion, to belittle by comparison the world work of men. But it is to the women of the community we must look for inspiration in working for the utility, convenience, beauty and the well ordered conduct in all respects that constitute present day civilization and are what make life really worth living. What I have been trying to say regarding pioneer women has been much better said in verse by an author whose name I do not know. I am sure I will be forgiven for reading it:

In the log-built, shake-roofed homestead  
Of some early foothill's ranch,  
In the tent beside the 'bankment  
Of the latest railway branch,  
In the shacks on new selections,  
In the camps of man's unrest,  
On the frontiers of the nation  
Lived the women of the West,  
We had the will to do and dare  
And yet o'er all the rest  
The hearts that made the nation  
Were the women of the West.

In honoring the still living pioneers on this occasion I am sure we would wish to do honor as well to those many others who although they may have come later and have already passed on had their part in the work of nation building in this famed and favored locality of Clover Bar. May I pay a tribute to them by giving another quotation, not in verse: It is by John Innes, a noted painter of western scenes; now of Vancouver, formerly of Calgary. It accompanies a series of his western paintings. It reads:

"Dedicated by the artist to the Brotherhood of the  
Unafraid, the trail-blazers and builders of this Dominion;  
who made the way straight in the wilderness for those  
who were to follow.

"The immortal dead, who breathe again

"In lives made better by their presence.

"That which they conquered we have inherited. It is  
the Great North West."

